

CHILE 2013 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom.

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Incidents of anti-Semitism included online harassment, verbal slurs, and vandalism.

U.S. embassy officials discussed religious tolerance with the National Office of Religious Affairs (ONAR) and leaders of numerous religious groups, focusing on the value of deepening institutional cooperation. The embassy organized an iftar with an ecumenical group of religious leaders to promote religious tolerance, and embassy officers attended interfaith events.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 17.2 million (July 2013 estimate). According to the 2002 census, the most recent available, 70 percent of the population over the age of 14 is Roman Catholic and 15 percent is “evangelical,” a term referring to all non-Catholic Christian groups except The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah’s Witnesses, Orthodox (Armenian, Greek, Persian, Serbian, and Ukrainian churches), and Seventh-day Adventists. Approximately 90 percent of those classified as evangelical are Pentecostal. Anglican, Baptist, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Reformed Evangelical, and Wesleyan groups constitute the remaining 10 percent. Bahais, Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, and members of the Unification Church collectively constitute less than 5 percent of the population.

According to the 2002 census, 5 percent of the population self-identifies as “indigenous,” of whom 65 percent identify as Catholic, 29 percent as Protestant, and 6 percent as “other.”

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom.

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Church and state are officially separate. The law prohibits religious discrimination. The ONAR is part of the executive branch and is responsible for promoting religious freedom and tolerance. The office's mandate is to work with all religious organizations to implement constitutional provisions on religious freedom.

The law allows any religious group to apply for religious nonprofit status. The Ministry of Justice may not refuse to accept a registration petition, although it may object to the petition within 90 days if all legal prerequisites for registration are not satisfied. Applicants must present to the Ministry of Justice an authorized copy of their charter and corresponding bylaws along with signatures and identification numbers from all those who signed the charter. The bylaws must include the organization's mission, creed, and structure. The charter needs to specify the signers, the name of the organization, its physical address, and include confirmation that bylaws have been approved. The petitioner then has 60 days to address objections the ministry raises or challenge the ministry in court. Once registered, the state cannot dissolve a religious entity by decree. The semiautonomous Council for the Defense of the State may initiate a judicial review, but the government has never de-registered a legally registered group. The law allows religious groups to adopt a charter and bylaws suited to a religious group rather than a private corporation. Religious groups may establish affiliates (schools, clubs, and sports organizations) without registering them as separate entities.

The law provides civil legal remedies to victims of discrimination based on religion or belief. The law also increases criminal penalties for acts of violence based on discrimination.

Publicly-subsidized schools must offer religious education for two teaching hours per week through high school. Parents may have their children excused from religious education. Local school administrators decide how funds are spent on religious instruction. The majority of religious instruction in public schools is Catholic, although the Ministry of Education has approved curricula for 14 other religious groups. Schools must teach the religion requested by the parents. Parents may homeschool their children for religious reasons or enroll them in private schools.

The law grants religious groups the right to have chaplains in public hospitals, prisons, and military units. Regulations for the armed forces and law enforcement

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agencies allow officially registered religious groups to appoint chaplains to serve in each branch of the armed forces, in the national uniformed police, and the national investigative police.

The ONAR trains clergy of various religious groups on hospital protocol and issues government identification badges. An accreditation process provides hospital patients access to their preferred religious representatives. The prison system has both Catholic and Protestant staff chaplains and a large number of volunteer chaplains.

Government Practices

Catholicism had a dominant presence in public schools, prisons, hospitals, and the military. Representatives from the ONAR held regular roundtable meetings with Protestant leaders to discuss mechanisms to increase Protestant pastoral presence in these institutions. Protestant leaders continued to advocate for more paid chaplain positions.

The celebration of a Catholic mass frequently marked official and public events. At military events, all members of participating units were obliged to attend. Government officials attended Catholic events as well as major Protestant and Jewish ceremonies.

In October, President Sebastian Pinera and the ONAR published a report on the commitments previously made to the Protestant community, such as assuring freedom of religion for members of the armed forces and making the media available for evangelicals to share their message, with the stated aim of increasing governmental support and working toward religious equality. Leaders of the Protestant community stated that the government had fulfilled 45 percent of the promises it made.

Authorities did not effectively implement the requirement to provide non-Catholic education in schools when requested by parents. ONAR officials traveled to various regions and met with educators and religious leaders to stress that non-Catholic religion classes, specifically Protestant classes, must be offered when requested. The ONAR provided assistance to municipal offices of religious affairs to develop community-supported curricula in public schools. ONAR established working groups on religious affairs in 51 of 54 provinces.

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Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Anti-Semitic incidents included verbal slurs, online harassment, and vandalism. Authorities and Jewish community groups noted anti-Semitic comments, including via social media and email correspondence.

The ONAR received complaints from Muslim immigrants and tourists when entering the country and when applying for visas, citing discrimination and the refusal to provide requested accommodations such as female screeners for female passengers. The ONAR worked with the Chilean International Police to resolve issues as they arose and inform officers regarding acceptable procedures.

On May 20, comedian Elias Escobedo on the national “Hazme Reir” television program made anti-Semitic jokes when referring to the Holocaust. The Jewish Community of Chile (CJCH) condemned the remarks, reported an increase in anti-Semitic emails received through its web site, and noted anti-Semitic comments made to online articles published about the incident. In response, the television station dismissed Escobedo, and the National Television Council fined the station.

On March 2, the CJCH reported an attack on a member of their community in the city of Vina del Mar. The attacker shouted anti-Semitic slurs at the CJCH community member and then assaulted him. The CJCH also reported tagging of Nazi symbols at the Beit Emunah Community in Santiago February 25, and vandalism of security cameras at the Hebrew School April 6.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy representatives met periodically with religious leaders and ONAR officials. Discussions focused on the value of deepening institutional cooperation, increasing dialogue among religious youth, and the effective implementation of anti-discrimination legislation, a theme many Jewish leaders emphasized.

On July 17, the Charge d’Affaires hosted an iftar attended by 20 leaders of various religious groups. The event emphasized religious tolerance and improving interfaith dialogue among youth, and honored the Muslim tradition of iftar in a religiously diverse setting. As a result of the dinner, on December 4, the embassy met with six religious leaders and an ONAR representative to discuss ways to facilitate dialogue and acceptance among youth. Outcomes of the meeting

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included plans to tour churches and temples with youth leaders from each religious group and explain basic principles and beliefs.

Embassy representatives attended events throughout the year involving various religious communities hosted by governmental and private institutions.